DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 608 CS 209 441

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TITLE Evaluation of Eleventh Grade Students' Writing Supports Teaching Italic Handwriting.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cursive Writing; Grade 11; Handwriting; High Schools; *Manuscript Writing (Handlettering); *Teaching Methods; *Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS *Italic Writing

ABSTRACT

The handwriting of 756 eleventh grade students was evaluated to determine whether their handwriting styles would be characteristic of the manuscript or cursive styles they had been taught. Subjects had been taught Zaner-Bloser manuscript in primary grades with a transition to cursive in third grade. Analysis of handwriting samples revealed a wide variation in handwriting styles. The samples were grouped into the following categories: cursive, straight cursive, italic cursive, roundy cursive, manuscript, italic print, backhand, and block print. The results indicated that although these students had been taught manuscript and cursive, none of the students wrote manuscript and only approximately 13% wrote cursive characteristic of Zaner-Bloser style cursive. Although no students had received instruction in italic, 47% of the students wrote italic cursive or italic print and nearly 2 1/2 times as many students wrote italic cursive as wrote the commercial cursive style they had been taught. The results support the ideas of teaching both italic print instead of manuscript and italic cursive instead of commercial cursive. (Evaluation criteria and samples for each of the handwriting styles are included.) (HTH)

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EVALUATION OF ELEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS' WRITING SUPPORTS TEACHING ITALIC HANDWRITING

Dr. Betty Duvall

During of an evaluation of handwriting for the Great Falls (Montana) Public Schools, a wide variation of styles of handwriting was noted in the samples from 756 eleventh grade students. These students had been taught Zaner-Bloser manuscript in primary grades with a transition to cursive in third grade. The assumption would be that the students' writing would be characteristic of manuscript or cursive styles taught.

When the handwriting of the eleventh grade students was analyzed, it was found that many of the samples did not fit the characteristics of Zaner-Bloser manuscript or cursive. The samples were grouped according to characterists as described below. (Samples that fit more than one classification were placed under the classification most characteristic.)

Criteria for Classification

The following criteria was established for placing samples into groups:

Cursive. Samples were judged as cursive if letters were joined, small ascender and descender letters had loops, small letters were elliptically shaped and the writing appeared to be slanted.

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Straight Cursive. Samples were judged as straight cursive if letters were joined, small ascender and descender letters had loops, small letters were elliptical in shape, and the writing had little or no slant.

Italic Cursive. Samples were judged as italic cursive if some but not all letters were joined, small ascender and descender letters did not have loops, small letters were elliptically shaped and the writing had little or no slant.

Roundy Cursive. Samples were judged as roundy cursive if some but not all letters were joined, small letters were round in shape and the writing had little or no slant. Roundy cursive was to have the appearance of joined manuscript.

Manuscript. Samples were judged as manuscript if the writing had no slant, no letters were joined, and the small letters were round in appearance.

Italic Print. Samples were judged as italic print if the writing had little or no slant, no letters were joined, and the small letters were elliptical in appearance.

Backhand. Samples were judged as backhand if the writing slanted to the left of vertical regardless of any other characteristics.

Block Print. Samples were judged as block print if written in all capital letters.

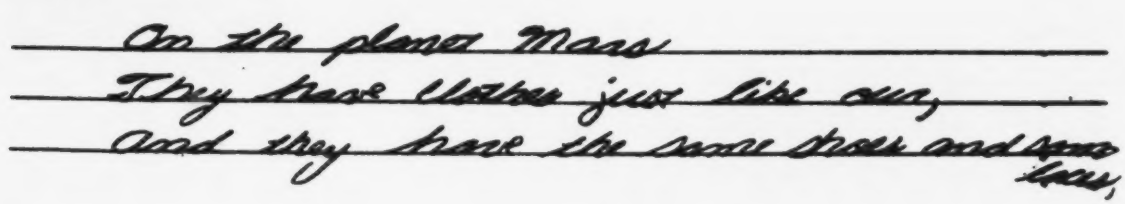
Number of Samples by Classification

Once the samples were sorted by the author, two judges were asked to verify the classification of the samples. (One

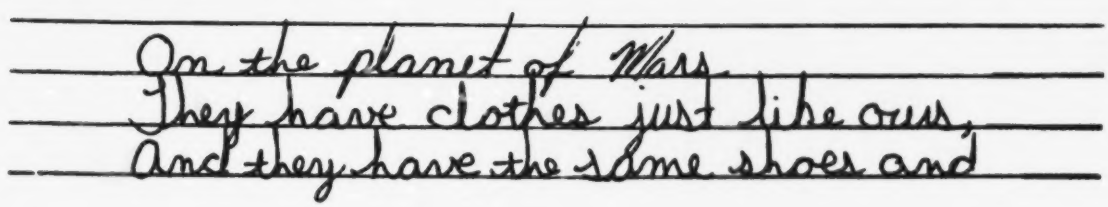
judge had taught only manuscript and cursive. One judge had taught manuscript, cursive, and italic.) Samples were rearranged until consensus was reached among the judges.

Below is an example for each classification:

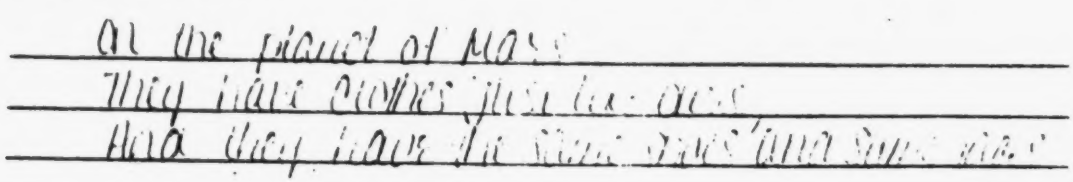
Cursive



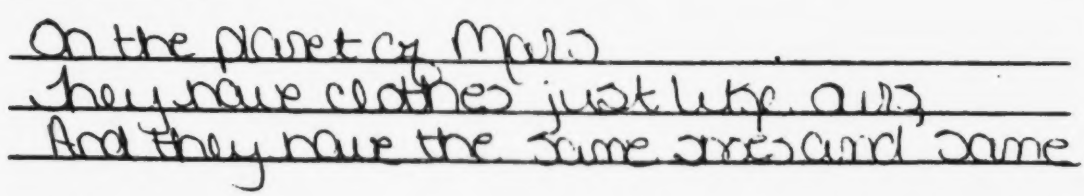
Straight Cursive



Italic Cursive



Roundy Cursive



Manuscript

(No examples of manuscript were found in the 756 samples.)

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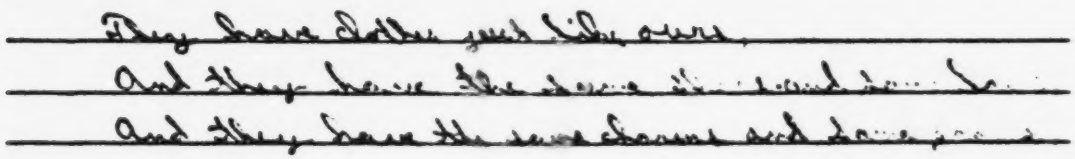
Italic Print

And they have the same charms and same graces,
And they have the same heads and same faces...
But not in the

Backhand



Block Print

On the planet of Mars
They have clothes just like ours,
And they have the same shoes and same laces,

The chart below shows the number of students whose writing was sorted into each classification.

CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Cursive	101
Straight Cursive	252
Italic Cursive	249
Roundy Cursive	25
Manuscript	0
Italic Print	101
Backhand	23
Block Print	5

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The greatest number of students wrote straight cursive (252). Listed in descending order, the number of samples chosen for each classification were: straight cursive (252), italic cursive (249), cursive (101), italic print (101), roundy cursive (25), backhand (23), block print (5), and manuscript (0).

It is interesting to note that, although these students had been taught manuscript and cursive, none of the students wrote manuscript and only approximately 13% wrote cursive characteristic of Zaner-Bloser style cursive. Over five times as many students wrote a version of cursive as those who wrote the cursive characteristic to the style they had been taught.

The literature reports that italic is the easiest way to write. Although no students had received instruction in italic, 47% of the students in this study wrote italic cursive or italic print and nearly 2 1/2 times as many students wrote italic cursive as wrote the (commercial) cursive style they had been taught. This indicates that italic cursive is easier than the (commercial) cursive conventionally taught.

None of the students wrote manuscript, but thirteen percent of the students wrote italic print. This indicates that italic print is easier to write, even without instruction, than manuscript is with instruction.

Conclusions

Students (taught manuscript/cursive) do not write the way they have been taught by the time they reach the 11th grade. There is cause to question the value of teaching manuscript/cursive

if only about 13% of the students in this study retained the characteristics of the cursive and none retained the characteristics of the manuscript that was taught. The time of students and teachers is waisted when seven years of instruction is devoted to handwriting styles which are deserted.

Instruction in manuscript is a waste of time. None of the students in this study wrote manuscript even though they had received approximately 3 1/2 years of instruction. These students found the round, vertical letter forms of manuscript were not functional for everyday writing. Manuscript writing is based on a circle which is more difficult to form than an ellipse. Because manuscript is written with no slant, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to write rapidly.

Consideration should be given to teaching italic print instead of manuscript. Thirteen percent (101) of the students in this study (without receiving instruction) adapted their writing to an elliptical, slanted, unjoined italic print. None of the students wrote the manuscript they had been taught.

Consideration should be given to teaching italic cursive instead of commercial cursive. Although most 11th grade students wrote a form of cursive, the majority of students did not write the continuous-joined, slanted commercial cursive style. The cursive style (used in all commercial programs except italic) is based on copperplate engraving, a printing process. This style was choosen because copperplate was the only known means of reproducing copy books at the turn of the century. The influence

of engraving on roundhand (the style from which copperplate engraving took its form) led to the joining of all the letters within words, the elaboration of capitals, and to the increase in slant. There is no research to support the speed superiority of joined over unjoined writing. The many directional stroke changes needed for the continuous joining of letters and elaborate capital letters of (commercial) cursive are difficult, if not impossible for many, to master. The most natural slant has been established at 5o from the vertical, yet (commercial) cursive is taught at from 30-38o. The extreme slant of (commercial) cursive causes it to fall into a flat scrawl when written rapidly.

In this study nearly 2 1/2 times as many students chose italic cursive as chose (commercial) cursive even though these students had received no instruction in italic. In italic cursive not all the letters are joined, the capital letters are simplier and italic cursive is written at the recommended 5o slant.

The results of this study support teaching italic handwriting. The practice of introducing the student to manuscript based on circles and vertical lines with a transition to a (commercial) cursive handwriting based on elliptical slanted forms should be abandoned. In other disciplines, children are provided with continuity of instruction; teachers build on previously developed concepts. With the increase in the amount of information to be covered at all grade levels, time can not be wasted teaching **anything** that is not functional.

Italic handwriting is not in conflict with concepts of

sound instructional technique. The italic writing of the Renaissance is simplier and easier to master than the elaborate decorative (commercial) cursive based on copperplate engraving. The child begins as he will continue. The italic print letters introduced are based on an elliptical shape and are slightly slanted. These print letters are adapted to italic cursive handwriting by adding entrances and exits and joining the same letter forms taught in primary grades. The capital italic letters are simple in form.